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van Schaik, Carel P

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Book Review

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Carel P van Schaik

Agner Fog, *Warlike and peaceful societies: The interaction of genes and culture*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2017, 364 pp., ISBN 9781783744039 (pbk); 978-17-837-4404-6 (hbk).
Reviewed by: Carel P van Schaik, *University of Zurich, Switzerland*

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Like it or not, war is a human universal. Not surprisingly, social scientists try hard to understand its causes and consequences. Yet, the challenge is great: the face of war varies tremendously, along with the size, subsistence base, and technology level of societies and has therefore changed dramatically during human prehistory and history, including the post-WWII period. Enter Agner Fog's regality theory. According to Fog, the frequency or threat of war has profoundly affected the structure of human societies, as reflected in the gradient from peaceful to warlike, or in his parlance from kungic to regal, societies. In a regal society, people will prefer a strong leader to effectively deal with the external threat and will accept a hierarchical political structure and strong discipline to deal with this threat. They will also develop a strong feeling of tribal or national identity, resulting in xenophobia and intolerance. Regal societies are also expected to have stricter religions and more rigid sexual mores, and even develop peculiar grandiose styles of art and architecture. Kungic societies are at the opposite, more egalitarian and relaxed end of the gradient.

Fog reviews studies of people's attitudes and preferences across modern societies and concludes that they all follow the kungic-regal gradient. He also offers an extensive review of studies of modern wars, stressing how they have changed during the past half-century, and how elites manipulate, deceive, and engage in fearmongering in order to stay in power, all the while making ready use of the tendency of the mass media to exaggerate threats, known as the 'mean world syndrome' (or controlling the media to ensure this happens). Linked to this, Fog cites a variety of case studies in support of his view that leaders and contenders for leadership exaggerate threats in order to increase public acceptance of their rule.

A special feature of the book is the presentation of 18 carefully verified ethnographies of selected preindustrial societies, ranging from nomadic foragers to highly stratified kingdoms. This is followed by a statistical analysis of the standard cross-sectional sample of non-industrial societies as well as the subset of detailed case studies, and a similar analysis of the survey of contemporary worldviews. All analyses find support for regality theory.

Despite these positive aspects, the book does not incorporate the results of recent work looking for explanations inspired by evolutionary biology. This means there are reasons to worry that it overestimates the impact of war or misdiagnoses particular cases. I will make some specific comments based on these new approaches to illustrate their value.

First, regality theory does not distinguish between within-society inequality that arose through command hierarchies emerging in the face of an external threat on one hand, and inequality that arose as a result of purely internal processes based on resource monopolization by powerful elites on the other hand. Perhaps, this is because the author implicitly assumes that this suppression can only work when societies frequently engage in war, but an alternative possibility links elite formation, with the attending patriarchical structure

Universität Zürich, Zürich, Switzerland

Corresponding author:
Carel P van Schaik, Winterthurerstrasse, 190, Zurich 8057, Switzerland.
Email: vschaik@aim.uzh.ch

and polygynous mating system, to the monopolizability of critical resources and the loss of interdependence upon the adoption of sedentism and food production, especially where this is accompanied by storage (Mattison, Smith, Shenk, & Cochrane, 2016). The author therefore does not explore the possibility that within-group processes historically produced elites first and that these elites subsequently became addicted to (offensive) war in order to maintain their benefits in the face of their rapidly expanding numbers. As a result, there is no analysis of how external threat interacts with these within-group monopolization processes and how the outcome of this conflict affects the features of the societies concerned.

A second problem is that the book fundamentally assumes that engaging in warfare is always so risky that a serious collective action problem arises, in other words that free-riding would be adaptive and that sending men to war is always against their interests. This may well be true for enlisted soldiers in modern societies, but need not have held in small-scale, egalitarian societies, in which raids and surprise ambushes were the rule (Glowacki & Wrangham, 2013). Our war psychology may thus have evolved in days when warfare was conducted in completely different ways.

Related to this, Fog conflates leadership, where individuals can bestow status upon someone, and dominance, where status is based on coercion. In the first case, one may assume that the tendency to follow a leader is both voluntary and adaptive, whereas the opposite holds in the second case. The ethnographic literature often mentions war leaders in small-scale egalitarian societies, who are appointed by the others and derive major prestige from being a war leader, but become a regular member of society once the war is over. The presentation of regality theory does not distinguish between situations where leaders are followed voluntarily and those where leaders coerce the rest into following them. We should expect very different societal dynamics in the two cases, and by ignoring the distinction we run the risk of attributing all support for war as the product of deception, or of missing what makes such deception possible in the first place. Indeed, leaders may be able to coordinate genuine excitement about engaging in war in the population, even in societies with inequality, when the population feels they face an existential threat. Thus, agent-based models by Turchin, Currie, Truner, and Gavrilets (2013) show how the raiding and plundering by equestrian nomads forged polities together to organize communal defense, leading to the rise of empires with overall positive effects on the wellbeing of their inhabitants.

Overall, therefore, the book may not provide a complete explanation for all the features of societies. First, it does not control for the effects of within-group processes unrelated to warfare, which makes it difficult to estimate the independent effect of regality per se. Not every feature of modern societies, including classical music or majestic architecture, need be a product of warfare. And second, it fails to examine the idea that manipulating mismatched war psychology made it possible for elites to maintain coercive power in modern societies. These problems aside, it presents a valuable overview of the extensive literature on the societal correlates of modern warfare and makes a convincing, and timely, case for the deceptive use of the threat of war by populists or budding dictators.

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